



Iraqi security forces receive a shipment of 30 mine-resistant ambush-protected vehicles with mine-roller attachments at Camp Taji, Iraq, on July 13, 2015. The 310th Advise and Assist Team, 13th Expeditionary Sustainment Command, and the 1st Theater Sustainment Command supervised the delivery of the vehicles in support of Combined Joint Task Force–Operation Inherent Resolve. (Photo by Chief Warrant Officer 2 Christina Winfield)

Sustaining Operation Inherent Resolve

The 13th Expeditionary Sustainment Command faced many sustainment challenges while deployed to Operation Inherent Resolve, but it succeeded by effectively collaborating with strategic partners.

■ By Lt. Col. Dean A. Huard

After the inception of Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003, the sustainment community could provide all classes of supply to maneuver forces with few limitations. As the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan matured, the Army maintained high levels of sustainment stocks. Benefiting from plenty of sustainment personnel and well-established lines of communication, warfighters received

their commodities when they needed them to perform their missions. Sustainment operations became routine.

The 13th ESC's Mission

The situation was not routine for the 13th Expeditionary Sustainment Command (ESC) when it had mission command of all sustainment operations in the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) area of respon-

sibility (AOR) from December 2015 to August 2016 during Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR).

The 13th ESC's mission in support of OIR was complex and unique. It required junior warrant officers, non-commissioned officers, and officers to use problem-solving and critical analysis skills as well as collaboration with strategic partners and the Combined Joint Task Force–Operation

Inherent Resolve (CJTF–OIR) staff.

The 13th ESC's operational environment had many limiting challenges, including air-centric transportation, diplomatic clearance requirements for flights into Iraq, and a capped force manning level that resulted in a dependence on contractors.

Doctrinally, ESCs are regionally focused on a specific joint operational area. However, during the 13th ESC's deployment, the unit integrated with the 1st Theater Sustainment Command (TSC) operational command post (OCP) and was required to spread its focus across multiple areas.

The 1st TSC is the senior sustainment command in the CENTCOM AOR and reports directly to the U.S. Army Central commander. It is responsible for theater sustainment mission command across CENTCOM and for OIR in Iraq and Syria, Operation Freedom's Sentinel in Afghanistan, and Operation Spartan Shield, the enduring operation for regionally aligned forces supporting contingency operations in the Middle East. It also supports the Multinational Force and Observers mission on the Sinai Peninsula.

The 1st TSC has operational control of sustainment brigades in Afghanistan and Kuwait and logistics elements in Iraq that include an Army field support brigade, a human resources support center, a financial management support center, a theater aviation maintenance group, and a movement control battalion. It also has tactical control of a Military Surface Deployment and Distribution Command transportation brigade.

The mission set had the 13th ESC commander serving as the deputy commanding general for the 1st TSC OCP. However, as the OIR mission proceeded, the 13th ESC commander's emphasis was predominantly on sustaining building partner capacity (BPC) sites in Iraq.

When the 13th ESC arrived in Kuwait, the 1st TSC OCP's mission took a dramatic shift. It went from

ensuring that retrograde equipment was properly accounted for from Afghanistan to the United States to sustaining a total of five BPC sites with all classes of supply in Iraq.

The mission of the BPC sites was to train and equip Iraqi army units in order to prepare them for offensive operations against the Islamic State group.

Sustainment Challenges

One of the first challenges that the 13th ESC faced was that there was no existing ground line of communication (GLOC) established between Kuwait and Iraq other than the one used by a Defense Logistics Agency Troop Support contract for class I (subsistence). It was not possible to use the existing contract to move additional supplies because of the time it would take to initiate the additional features of the contract.

The "Black Jack Express" convoy routes into Iraq that crossed the main entrance from Kuwait (known as the "K-crossing") did not exist anymore because Iraq closed the gate when coalition forces departed in 2011. Most BPC sites required resupply by air, which proved difficult because the airfields' runways were in poor condition.

The Iraqi government had also imposed restrictions such as not flying on Fridays because of religious concerns. The most restrictive policy was the requirement for all flights to have a 96-hour diplomatic clearance, which resulted in waiting an average of 10 to 14 days for personnel and five to 10 days for equipment to enter Iraq. This created turmoil as the requirements to push supplies, Iraqi Train and Equip Fund (ITEF) equipment, and passengers increased daily.

Another challenge that the unit encountered was a force cap that allowed only 3,100 troops on the ground in Iraq. The manning cap limited the ESC's ability to provide adequate sustainment; therefore, it had to rely on contractors and the sustainment brigade's reconfigured forward

logistics elements, which supported the maneuver units at the BPC sites. Most services for classes I and III (petroleum, oils, and lubricants) and life support were contracted.

Unfortunately, the ESC quickly learned that the process was bureaucratic, cumbersome, and not responsive in an expeditionary environment. The command was responsible for more than 200 contracts, and the average wait for funding approval alone was 21 days. The entire process (when all went well) was approximately 120 to 150 days.

To alleviate the challenges of this atypical sustainment mission, the ESC followed these procedures:

- Establish effective boards, bureaus, cells, centers, and working groups (for example, a distribution management board for opening the Iraq GLOC).
- Collaborate effectively with CJTF–OIR strategic partners and sustainment strategic enablers, such as the joint logistics enterprise.
- Prepare to work at the tactical level in order to solve strategic issues.
- Emphasize the importance of adaptation and teamwork.

Back to Iraq by Ground

In an effort to establish a GLOC, the 1st TSC OCP initiated an operational planning team to bring all key agencies to the table. The agencies included the Office of Military Cooperation–Kuwait, the Office of Security Cooperation–Iraq, the Kuwait Embassy, Kuwaiti customs, CENTCOM CJ4 Mobility, and the Combined Joint Forces Land Component Command–Iraq.

There were three main questions about establishing a GLOC:

- What are the processes and procedures for allowing weekly ground convoys from Kuwait into Iraq to deliver nonsensitive cargo for U.S. and coalition forces?
- What is the most feasible border crossing point?

- Can convoys transport cargo to all BPC locations within Iraq?

The movement of sustainment into Iraq was managed through a weekly distribution management board and various Iraqi equipping meetings that were synchronized among the 1st TSC OCP, CJTFOIR J-4, subordinate logistics and maneuver units in Iraq, CENTCOM staff members, and strategic partners including the Military Surface Deployment and Distribution Command and CENTCOM's Deployment Distribution Operations Center.

Thanks to the efforts of the distribution management board, the GLOC was successfully reopened. Using the GLOC netted a time savings of up to 13 days over the use of air assets and a cost savings of \$3.8 million for the duration of the deployment.

Collaboration

In order to be successful with an uncommon mission, sustainment

professionals need to collaborate and employ the capabilities of agencies and commands within their sphere of influence. The art of collaboration is not always taught and is especially challenging for less experienced logisticians.

When people work within their own unit or department, communicating and completing a common goal are much less complicated. However, the 13th ESC's mission required that Soldiers at all ranks work with many agencies.

In fact, the unit had to collaborate with no less than 30 organizations from the strategic level at the Pentagon, 43 coalition country representatives, and numerous sustainment agencies, such as the Defense Logistics Agency, the Army Materiel Command, CENTCOM's Deployment Distribution Operations Center, and the Army Contracting Command.

One of the benefits of collaborating at this level was that Soldiers

were pushed to work outside of their comfort levels. Junior warrant officers, company-grade officers, and senior noncommissioned officers were working on issues and problem sets that they did not witness in garrison or classroom environments and had to adapt to "being comfortable with being uncomfortable."

Prepare to Be Tactical

Because of the challenges and personnel shortages, the 13th ESC's Soldiers were in a position that required them to coordinate problem-solving from the strategic to the tactical levels. Examples included sending personnel in a temporary duty status to the supported maneuver unit, using contract personnel, and sending teams of maintenance personnel to ensure units understood the ordering system for repair parts.

The mission of ensuring that the Iraqis had their ITEF equipment in a timely manner required the ESC to plan deliberately with the sustain-



ment brigade. It also had to employ the services of the Department of State, which ensured that the Iraqi government received ITEF and foreign military sales equipment.

A High-Performing Team

The Army teaches and preaches about teamwork throughout a Soldier's career. For the mission to support CJTF-OIR to be successful, the ESC had to work as a high-performing team. The common purpose of wanting to sustain OIR in order to eradicate the Islamic State group brought the unit together.

It may seem simple to say that teamwork is important, but the 13th ESC experienced the benefits every day as multiple agencies and countries worked in synergy. During the deployment, the ESC continued its leader professional development and focused on the importance of teamwork and its many benefits to the mission. The ESC learned that high-performing teams are what

make units successful.

Whether the task is to create an innovative product or service or to design a new process or system, teams rather than individuals are assuming more of the load than ever before. The ideal team combines individual talents and skills into one super-performing entity with capabilities that surpass those of even its most talented member.

The 13th ESC's collaboration was possible because its Soldiers trusted each other, shared a strong sense of team identity, and had confidence in their abilities and effectiveness.

The 13th ESC deployment to the CENTCOM AOR was an exciting and challenging opportunity for logisticians. The deployment required logisticians to reopen one theater, retrograde and draw down another, increase the force protection efforts in another, and advise, assist, and equip foreign forces in yet another.

Success required a partnership

with the joint logistics enterprise and partners from the strategic level to the tactical level.

The ESC faced atypical sustainment challenges but surpassed all expectations by collaborating with strategic partners, adapting to each problem set, working at the tactical level when necessary, and emphasizing the importance of being a high-performing team.

Lt. Col. Dean A. Huard was the deputy support operations officer for the 13th ESC while it was deployed to the 1st TSC OCP. He holds a bachelor's degree in political science with a minor in public policy and management from the University of Oregon and a master's degree in public administration from American Military University. He is a graduate of the Quartermaster Officer Basic and Advanced Courses, the Command and General Staff College, the Lean Six Sigma Black Belt Course, and the Joint Forces Staff College.

Mine-resistant ambush-protected vehicles with mine-roller attachments are parked at Camp Taji, Iraq, on July 13, 2015. The vehicles were acquired through the Iraq Train and Equip Fund used to assist in the fight against the Islamic State group. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Brian McDermott)

